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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with suggestions for elementary school guidance program development. (1) The guidance program should be constructed on the needs of the individual school and its unique attributes. Stereotyped programs should be avoided. (2) The counselor's most important attributes are knowledge and skill in the art of human relations. (3) The initiation phase, including the development of program labels, is all important since the expectations for the program are set at that time. (4) The counselor should approach the staff with the philosophy that other personnel are to be accepted as they are, and that the counselor's purpose is that of service and assistance, rather than expert supervision. (5) Decision making with regard to objectives and program directions should be a cooperative venture in which administration, school staff, and the counselor participate together. (6) The counselor should avoid being identified with either the administration or the instructional staff. (7) A communication system which effectively interprets the guidance program operation, its purposes, and its goals is essential for program development and progress. (Author/KJ)

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ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GUIDANCE

EDO 44725

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Suggestions . . .

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ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GUIDANCE

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

SUGGESTIONS

December 1969

FOREWORD

Mr. Kenneth E. York, Associate in Education Guidance, fulfilled an assignment to observe the introduction of programs of elementary school guidance in a number of New York State School Districts. This is a condensation of his report. The districts involved were cooperating with the Bureau of Guidance in its Elementary School Guidance Pilot Project.

We believe Mr. York's comments will be useful to others considering the initiation of a program of guidance services at the elementary school level.

The report was prepared under the supervision of Ivan H. Miller, Supervisor, Bureau of Guidance.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GUIDANCE PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT SUGGESTIONS

Introduction

Three basic steps are essential for moving elementary school guidance into successful operation: first, the school administrator must become convinced that the school should develop such a program; second, the staff must accept the plan and desire to use it; third,it must be understood by parents. A very effective way to convince administrators that a program of elementary guidance should be considered is to arrange for observation of successful programs in action. Written descriptions, speeches, other materials, and contacts should be regarded as preliminary and supplemental to actual visits. Visits will be most productive when observers are able to see elementary school guidance operating as part of a normal, ongoing program in a school situation very similar to their own.

Assessing Needs

New positions should not be added to any school district or school until the needs have been carefully assessed. Most organizations, including schools, carry on continual assessment of needs, often informal in nature, which results in evolution of program. Some schools, as organizations, are more open in a communications sense than others, and more responsive to the actual or felt needs of the community, pupils, teachers, or others. District and building administrators, by virtue of the nature of their responsibilities, are usually alert to developing community or organizational needs. Parents and teachers, on the other hand, may be closer to, and more aware of, emerging problems and the needs of individual children, or groups of children. Informal discussions which involve parents and teachers, as well as other persons with whom the counselor may be expected to collaborate, can be helpful to the administrator - as a way of validating his own perceptions of guidance related pupil needs and educational concerns.

Often, pupil needs and direct pupil services are the primary and most obvious concerns. The indirect services which may also result from the needs of administrators, teachers, and other adults who affect the lives of children should not be overlooked. Pressures on adults affect the emotional climate of a school and the school's impact upon pupils. Alert administrators are concerned about both the needs of pupils, and the needs of school staff members.

The findings of an informal survey of needs, both immediate-specific and general long-range, should be circulated to interested persons, and followed up with discussions which have the purpose of creating a positive climate of concern for accomplishing educational improvement. Publicity should be avoided at this stage. At this point in the assessment, it is possible that the local concerns will indicate a priority of needs other than those which can be met through the employment of an elementary school counselor.

In a great many districts and schools, such an assessment will indicate needs which can be accommodated by the employment of a guidance worker. Many elementary school staffs are desperately in need of specialized assistance in the areas of individual and group counseling for children and related services for parents. Where elementary schools have increased the number of part-time specialist personnel, additional coordination, consultation, and followup procedures might help to assure larger benefits from the services currently provided. The educational programs in many schools would benefit from a fuller utilization of available community resources, including these available from child guidance and mental health clinics. Likewise, developing child study and case conference procedures, improving communication between the home and the school, and securing the cooperation of parents are sometimes indicated as emerging guidance-related educational concerns.

Establishing the Position

Once it has been determined that improvements related to guidance are worthy of priority, and the decision to hire staff has been made, it becomes important that the hiring official have a general idea of what the staff will be expected to accomplish. A generalized job description with the focus on the activities which will be expected, for whom, how carried out, and when, is usually provided. Such a description is a valuable aid in interviewing and selecting from among candidates. The goal is to match the personality, capabilities, skills, and interests of the candidate with the expectations which have been developed for the job. Such a job description should be tentative, and subject to dialogue, review, and alteration as the program develops. Where the person is to be employed in more than one building, it may be anticipated that the program will respond to the differing needs within each building, so that program activities and job differentiation may be expected for each school even within the same district.

The position title is important because it helps to establish expectations for the services to be rendered and the directions the program may take. Where coordination and consultation of pupil personnel and special education services are desired, and the identification, referral, and counseling of special pupils are to be priority needs on a districtwide basis, the title of Elementary Guidance Coordinator would be appropriate. If the focus is to be on group counseling activities, servicing needs on a full-time basis in one building, or perhaps two small units with 40 teachers or less, Elementary School Counselor could be appropriate. Where the expectation is for administration and coordination of the group testing program, with advisement to administrators concerning education placement on a districtwide basis, the title, Coordinator of Elementary Testing and Placement, could help to establish the desired expectations for the new position.

Introducing the Program

The new guidance program can be successfully introduced despite initial apathy or even opposition by some of the faculty. It is not necessary to have total agreement concerning needs and priorities, or to have unanimous favorable faculty opinion for the successful development of program.

Any change in the school program involving the addition of new and different personnel is apt to advance feelings of insecurity and inadequacy in some personnel. Professional concerns about innovations in other systems, and of the sincerity of individuals sponsoring innovations are usual concomitants of most efforts to inaugurate any program. Such questionin should therefore be anticipated.

Sensitivity to such anxiety and its relief by providing information, reassurance, and the promise of giving help are antidotes to such program development problems. The guidance program should be initiated in such a way that classroom teachers and other staff are allowed to quell whatever suspicions they may hold. If the program is to be successful, it is essential that teachers, pupils, parents, and others learn how to make appropriate use of the counselor's services, and that they be made to feel secure and competent in the process of doing so.

Substantial and continuing assistance to administrators and teachers by the counselor is the key to successful program development. This help, such as providing the faculty with inservice education, need not be provided in advance of initiating the program. When given, it is essential that the help be in line with the staff's perceptions of needs, not the counselor's. Many schools staff members are competent and secure, functioning in their jobs with ease and flexibility. Part of the counselor's role is to expand the numbers of school staff who are able to approach teaching and the educational process in other than a slavish or mechanistic fashion.

Classroom teachers, parents, and others not in closely related professional roles almost always judge the program by observing the reactions of pupils to the personnel involved. Observational evidence becomes the principal means of judging satisfaction. No evidence outweighs pupils' reactions and changes in pupil behavior as the measure of a successful program. Counselors, aware of such phenomena, should practice some selectivity in the referral procedures they establish, the cases accepted for conferences, the group guidance topics offered, and individuals accepted for group or individual counseling. A focus on children with problems of in-depth dimensions, not easily ameliorated with available resources and competencies, at the initial stage in program development, may result in an unfavorable judgment on the part of those whose support is necessary for accomplishing program continuation, development, and expansion.

Administrators and teachers, once comfortably involved in guidance program activities, will almost always express praise for its results. By participation in the planning and decisions as to the direction the program's activities should take, the school staff builds a commitment to it. To the extent that it becomes possible to involve staff members in such planning, making them secure and comfortable participating in guidance program activities, almost every new activity will be accepted by them as an improvement.

In many situations, after a base of staff involvement, understanding, and commitment has been established, giving the program increased visibility can help assure its further success and development. Outside attention can make the accompanying changes stimulating to the personnel involved, and outside recognition can make such personnel determined to succeed. Simply paying attention to what teachers are doing can improve their teaching. In the same way, introducing the guidance program to the community as something special and an innovation, so that outside visitors, parents, researchers, or

even student teachers are invited to take note, will have the effect of encouraging greater pupil output. Utilizing this "Hawthorne effect" will boost the immediate positive reception, but some drop-off in appreciation and morale should be anticipated as the program becomes accepted as an established part of the school's ongoing educational operation.

The effective counselor is well aware of the interpersonal dynamics operating in the school and is much concerned with maintaining positive relationships with the whole staff. In most situations, less than a major portion of counselor time will be spent in actual counseling activities with children. The majority of counselors will benefit by adopting the view that their training in counseling philosophy and related skills can also be applied as human relations philosophy and skills. This should improve a genuine attempt by the counselor to develop a helping relationship with all significant adults as much as with the pupil clientele. Individuals operating with such an orientation will continually seek to focus on the needs or concerns of others as others perceive them. Within this frame of reference, for example, newsletters or publicity releases will refer to program events which emphasize the role of the teacher, reflect the concerns of parents, and depict counselor functions in providing services to pupils. Similarly, though formal organizational procedures are desirable, the effective use of the informal communications structure may be even more essential. The day-to-day, face-to-face informal contacts are crucial factors in operational effectiveness and success.

It is unrealistic to expect the counselor to be as continually effective in informal procedures and skilled human relations as may be desired without having some source of supportive, empathic relationship available. Facing an evolving role, varying perceptions and expectations as to what

guidance is or can do, and the multiplicity of needs which are identified in many instances, the counselor faces a difficult and personally trying situation. Skillful administrators and others responsible for initiating and assisting in guidance program development will be amply rewarded by being sensitive to such needs of counselors. The counselor should be assured of opportunities to discuss personal concerns and aspirations, and personal recognition and praise should be awarded him for notable achievement.

Staffing Patterns

In districts with experience, there is almost unanimous opinion about the desirability of having a guidance counselor assigned to full-time service in one elementary school building. Where expectations of counselor services are high, it is important to effective practice to be immediately available when needed, not a day or two later. The nominal, part-time status of many education specialists has reduced their effectiveness. Often, the relationship which the full-time school counselor can establish with the school staff as a whole allows the counselor to become an effective link between the regular staff and such specialists. Building principals, too, tend to prefer the full-time assignment for the reason that the counselor's interpretations of program development concerns and school policies will be consistent, and the counselor cannot be put in the position of being asked to share information or make comparisons of different schools and their programs.

There are, however, some advantages to initiating a program through the broader, districtwide or multi-school assignment. Counselors in these assignments are exposed to a range of educational viewpoints. They develop an appreciation for districtwide concerns, and an awareness that each

individual school is unique in certain ways. Such experience can also be helpful to the counselor as a basis for enlarging his communications role. The movement of the incumbent counselor into a more limited assignment, where program development planning will allow the eventuality of additional guidance personnel, will often bring a sense of support, success, and accomplishment.

Program Description, Planning, Budgeting, and Further Development

The original tentative job description, developed from localized perceptions of pupils and school program needs, can become a basic process tool for program evolution and job development. Most guidance personnel employed at the elementary school level keep a calendar of their activities and run periodic time checks to analyze how their time is being spent. Continuing local discussions and the annual publication of each counselor's evolving job description, based on a continuing assessment of needs and progress, can be utilized as the basis for program development and collective decisions about the directions the counselor's activities will take.

It is crucial to program success that each guidance service be tailor-made to suit the situation of each school. Each elementary school, the community, the population served, and the staff are unique in many ways. Program services should evolve in line with the direction of education changes which are perpetually in process in each school. For this reason, the counselor must be an active participant in the needs reassessment processes and in the communication systems by which such needs are fed into the decision making processes of the school and district. Each counselor's reporting system, including informal verbal contacts, record anecdotes, memoranda, newsletters, annual reports, and budget requests should reflect particular work in progress in the specific situation and

locality within which the counselor is involved. Thus, by building guidance concerns into the operating communication procedures of the school, it becomes possible to inform others what the counselor is doing, and why, and the future directions envisioned for guidance activities.

Summary

1. The guidance program should be constructed on the needs of the individual school and its unique attributes. Stereotyped programs should be avoided.
2. The counselor's most important attributes are knowledge and skill in the art of human relations.
3. The initiation phase, including the development of program labels, is all important since the expectations for the program are set at that time.
4. The counselor should approach the staff with the philosophy that other personnel are to be accepted as they are, and that the counselor's purpose is that of service and assistance, rather than expert supervision.
5. Decision-making with regard to objectives and program directions should be a cooperative venture in which administration, school staff, and the counselor participate together.
6. The counselor, seeking to operate in an effective but impartial and objective manner, should avoid being identified with either the administration or the instructional staff.
7. A communication system which effectively interprets the guidance program operation, its purposes, and its goals is essential for program development and progress.